

REPORT

FROM THE

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,

In compliance with a resolution of the Senate of 20th May, 1826,

IN RELATION TO THE

DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING SEAMEN FOR THE NAVY,

THE

CAUSE OF SUCH DIFFICULTIES,

AND

THE MEASURES NECESSARY TO REMOVE THEM.

MAY 26, 1828.

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THE HISTORY OF THE

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NAVY DEPARTMENT,

May 23d, 1828.

SIR: The Secretary of the Navy, in answer to the resolution of the Senate, directing him to report "whether any, and what difficulties have occurred in obtaining seamen for the Navy, the cause of such difficulties, and what measures may be necessary to remove them," has the honor respectfully to present the following report:

Previous to the time when the resolution passed, great delay had occurred in enlisting seamen for our public vessels. Some of them had been detained in port several months by this cause, and others were permitted to go to sea, with a smaller number of men than was desirable, or than would, perhaps, have been entirely safe in a state of war. An allusion to this inconvenience, in a report from the Department, probably induced the inquiries made by the Senate.

When the resolution was received, some changes had already taken place, and at the time mentioned for making the report, it was not possible to designate with accuracy, or in such way as would communicate useful information, the difficulties to which it referred. Since that time, changes, both favorable and adverse, have been constantly occurring; and even at this moment, it is not practicable to do more than to notice the circumstances, which, at different periods, have created greater or less delay and trouble in manning our vessels, and to suggest the remedies which seem best fitted to relieve from future embarrassment. These circumstances will be found to differ materially, both as to permanence and influence; but the remedies which will be suggested, are believed to be such as will grow in importance as the Navy advances in strength.

First. Inquiry, "What difficulties have occurred in obtaining seamen for the Navy?"

Regular recruiting rendezvous are established at five naval stations: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Norfolk. These are opened by officers assigned by the Department to that duty, whenever seamen are wanted, and closed as soon as a supply for the immediate calls of the service is obtained. In a state of war, it has been found expedient and necessary sometimes to open them at other places. In peace, none but these are used.

The officers who superintend the rendezvous, are provided with appropriate instructions, and also with forms for the contract which the seamen are to sign, and for the returns which they have to make each week, and sometimes each day to the Department. The periods for which enlistments are made, cannot exceed three years.—Law of 15th May, 1820, vol. 6, page 540; and very few are now made for a shorter time.

The pay was fixed by the President of the United States, by authority of the law of 18th April, 1814, (vol. 4, page 704,) and since its passage, has been invariably at \$12 per month for able seamen, and less in proportion for ordinary seamen, landsmen and boys. It has not been raised even when they were scarce and difficult to be procured, because it would not be easy to reduce it when the necessity had passed by, without creating dissatisfaction.

The President is also authorized to order a bounty to be given on enlistment, and it has sometimes been proposed to give it, in order to fill the vessels more rapidly; but was declined, from a reluctance to commence a system of the kind in time of peace, which could not well be discontinued, and which ought to be reserved for the pressure of war.

The pay before-mentioned, has generally been inferior to that given in the merchants' service, which has varied from twelve to eighteen dollars per month, within the last three or four years.

There are no materials in the Department, from which an accurate estimate can be formed of the average numbers enlisted in each month previous to the year 1824. Since that time, returns and records have been made, which furnish this information. In 1824, the average per month was about 200—in the following years, about 100. In these latter years, it required six months to obtain the crew for a ship of the line, four months for a frigate, and one and a half for a sloop of war. The difficulty related principally to good seamen. Ordinary seamen and boys are almost always abundant. It became necessary, therefore, when vessels were to be put in commission, that the rendezvous should be open long before they were to sail, and a considerable portion of the term of enlistment had passed with many of the men, before the cruise commenced. Thence it was impracticable to keep our vessels out for three years, without creating the necessity of re-entering the men, or discharging them in foreign countries, which has sometimes been done.

These facts will explain the extent and operation of "the difficulties which have occurred in procuring seamen for the Navy," and which will probably augment, if some provision be not made, and some system adopted, which will secure to the nation a full and constant supply of native American seamen, sufficient both for the mercantile and military marine.

The following may be enumerated among the causes from which the difficulties have arisen:

1. The higher wages in the merchant service, with the allowance of small stores, have created a temptation not easily to be resisted by sailors, nor overcome by the recruiting officers. The average difference in the wages, is believed to have been about one-fourth. The allowance referred to, relieves them from some of the inconveniences to which their situation and labors expose them, especially for a short period after their enlistment and entrance on board the vessels.
2. The failure to recall the vessels so as to effect their discharge in our own ports, at the expiration of their enlistment. It is exceeding-

ly unpleasant for them to be detained longer than their contract stipulates, and their discharge in foreign countries exposes them to hardships and losses, which sometimes render them unwilling again to enter into a service which they would otherwise prefer.

3. It is the practice to enlist, not for particular ships, but for the general service—and it is not to be doubted, that this has caused delay, at times when sickness or other evils existed, or were supposed to exist, upon some of the stations, and the sailors were unwilling to go to them. They always prefer to enter for particular ships, whose destinations they know; and especially for such ships as are esteemed fortunate. Their partialities and superstitious feelings are very strong. But this objection could not well be obviated by the Department. The number of our vessels in commission is small; it is necessary often to change them from one station or cruising ground to another. Our period of enlistment is definite, and often terminates before the vessel can be brought home. These, and other causes, sometimes occasion a transfer of the crew from one vessel to another. If they were enlisted for particular vessels, we should be compelled to sustain serious inconvenience, or create dissatisfaction, by not adhering rigidly to the terms of the contract. It is believed to be much better to enlist more slowly, and to have entire control as to the place and time of service, and not hazard a violation of the faith of the government.

4. The want of proper hospital establishments for their comfort and accommodation in sickness and old age. This is almost the only subject on which the forecast of the seaman is exercised. He will trifle with property, disregard health, and leave to-morrow to provide for all the necessities which it may bring upon him—yet he anxiously desires to look forward to a comfortable asylum, when disease and age overtake him—and if there be better hospitals and asylums for him in the merchant service, he will make that a ground of preference. The hospitals connected with the Navy establishments, have heretofore been unworthy of the Naval service, and of the country—temporary in their nature, confined in their accommodations, and offering no anticipations of comfort to the sailor, when misfortune shall compel him to resort to them. And he feels the more keenly on the subject, because he is obliged every month to pay his twenty cents for this object, and he knows that the nation has never yielded a dollar of its treasure to furnish him with these necessary means of security and relief, after he shall have faithfully served it, and fought its battles.

5. A slight diminution has been produced by steam navigation, in the number of those who are employed in our rivers and bays, and on the coast, and who, after a little experience there, usually find their way to the ocean, to vessels engaged in foreign commerce, and to our public ships. This cause has not yet effected serious results, but will probably augment in importance. The coasting tonnage of the United States, exclusive of steam-boats, rose, in the year 1826, from 587,273 to 666,420 tons, and causes are in operation to create a further increase; still its growth will probably be less rapid than if steam were not used at all in our navigation. The employment which it will afford, and

the numbers which it will attract to the ocean, will be proportionably less.

6. A species of commerce has been carried on for some years past, which has drawn away some of our seafaring people, and occasionally produced delay in manning our ships. Not less than 2000 seamen have gone out in vessels which have been built here to be sold in the countries to the south of us. Most of these were men who usually found employment in our public vessels, and the larger part of them have not returned to the country. Some have entered another service—some have perished—others have been restored, through the agency of our consuls and the commanders of our ships of war.

7. A number of our seamen, principally those of foreign birth, have entered into privateers and into the service of Mexico and the South American governments, being tempted by bounties, the promise of higher pay, and the hope of prize money. This evil is passing by. Experience has not, in its full force, continued the temptation under which they acted. They are beginning to return, and will not probably again leave our service for the same objects and in the same quarter.

8. The increase of our shipping has rendered it difficult for the supply to keep pace with the demand. In 1822, our tonnage amounted to 1,324,699; in 1823, to 1,336,565; in 1824, to 1,389,163; in 1825, to 1,425,111; in 1826, to 1,534,191; being an average increase, per year, for four years, of about 52,373 tons, requiring an average annual increase of about 2,700 sailors. If the future augmentation of our tonnage should be proportioned to that which occurred in 1825 and 1826, as it probably will be, the annual increase of seamen to meet its demands must be more than 5000. The operation of this cause is not diminished, in its effects, by the practice of our merchants. Economy in navigation induces them to take, as far as practicable, able seamen only, and to exclude boys and inexperienced men: hence, while in other countries the average number of hands is about 1 for 15 tons, in ours it is about 1 for 19. Our vessels are, therefore, navigated more cheaply. But we do not afford a proportionate opportunity and sufficient nursery for training and educating the young to meet our future wants.

9. The number of foreign seamen in our employ. There have, at all times, been some of these, but they increased with great rapidity, during the continuance of those struggles which succeeded the commencement of the French Revolution. They sought here the greater security and comfort, and the higher wages which our prosperous commerce afforded. Upon a change of circumstances, many returned to their respective countries, and their places were not promptly supplied. It has been calculated that in the years 1806, 7, and 8, at least one-sixth of all the seamen navigating American vessels were foreigners by birth. This calculation was, probably, then, and would be even yet, too low. In our coasting trade and fisheries, very few but native seamen are employed; but in the different branches of our foreign trade, not less than one-fourth are foreigners. In the navy there are more than that proportion. The effect of this circumstance, it is not difficult to esti-

mate. Delays and embarrassments will often be produced in making enlistments, which would not exist if all or nearly all were native Americans: and it may be added, that, from the same source have arisen much the larger portion of our inconveniences as to discipline, crimes and punishments. It would be fortunate, in every respect, if not one man floated upon an American bottom, either mercantile or military, who did not claim American soil as his birth-place.

The joint operation of these causes, with some others of less influence, will account for the "difficulties which have occurred in enlisting seamen for the navy." "The measures which may be necessary to remove them," should be applied to the nature of these causes, and comport with the character of our institutions. They should be addressed to the interests, and to the freedom of action and choice in the citizen, and not to the exercise of violence or compulsive power. Impressment is the instrument of undelegated authority, and to be tolerated only where the citizen does not feel his right to that equality on which our institutions rest.

1. It is not believed to be expedient to increase the pay. It is already sufficient to procure the necessary numbers, provided other remedies within the power of the government be applied. This one should be reserved for times of greater pressure. The ration, which is fixed by law, and which may be regarded as a part of the pay, and the allowances upon entering on ship-board, might be usefully changed in some respects. Notice has been taken of this point, in former reports to Congress, to which reference is made.

2. The contract with the seaman should be scrupulously respected, and he should be discharged when it expires, and in his own country. If this be not done, he is dissatisfied, and unwilling again to enlist; and his services are often lost for ever to his Government, when he is landed in a foreign country, without the means of comfort and the power to return immediately. It is obviously impracticable in every instance to accomplish this desirable object, because the time of the seamen expires at different periods. It is also difficult to reduce the length of the cruises of our vessels, without greatly augmenting the expense of supporting our squadrons abroad. With the number and size of our vessels now in commission on the different stations, a reduction of the length of the cruise from three to two years, would create an annual addition to the expenses of supporting the navy of not less than \$ 150,000; still the object is so desirable, that every effort has been, and should continue to be, made to secure it. In June, 1827, a general circular letter was sent to the commanding officers at sea, and at the recruiting rendezvous, giving instructions upon the subject, which has already produced a salutary effect upon the feelings of the seamen towards the service, and will eventually lead to great good. A copy of that letter is added to this report. It is not perceived that any other measure is necessary in reference to this point.

3. Hospital establishments suited to the wants of the navy, and calculated to answer the just expectations of our seamen, can only be provided, at an early period, by legislative aid, in appropriating money

for that purpose. And the conviction is earnestly but most respectfully expressed, that there is no object on which a portion of the public funds could be bestowed with more advantage to the interest of the naval service, or to the honor and justice of the government and nation.

Heretofore nothing has been expended upon it, which was not drawn directly from the meagre pay of our officers and seamen. They have been exclusively taxed, to provide establishments which the humanity of the whole nation ought to have erected, and on which a portion of the national pride should have rested. Even that money taken from our seamen has not, until recently, been devoted to its proper destination—but has sometimes been used for other purposes. Reference on this point is made to the reports heretofore presented to Congress. For three years past, laborious attention has been paid to secure to the Hospital Fund all that it was entitled to receive under the law, and to commence and prosecute a system which should, in the end, furnish the buildings and accommodations which would be necessary or useful. By an order dated 11th March, 1824, all the money deducted from the pay of the officers and seamen is regularly transferred to the fund on the first day of every quarter. Sites have been purchased at Boston, New-York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk, and arrangements made for selecting one at Pensacola. An asylum at Philadelphia, and an hospital at Norfolk, have been commenced, and are progressing as rapidly as the magnitude of the buildings will justify. With sufficient funds at the control of the Commissioners, the hospitals at the places mentioned might be completed in two years, and a system established which would meet the wants of the navy for half a century to come; perhaps for ever. And should it be the will of Congress to make a suitable appropriation for this interesting object, a most salutary effect would be wrought upon the inclinations of seamen to enter the service, and upon all its highest and best interests.

For those difficulties which arise from steam navigation—from the commerce in vessels—from enlistments in the service of other governments—from the augmentation of tonnage—from the practice of taking few boys and green hands—and from the number of foreign seamen in our employ, there seems to be but one adequate and appropriate remedy; which is, such an increase of native *American seamen* as will answer every demand of our mercantile and naval marine. It will not be easy, speedily, if at all, to attain this result. The process must be slow; but it is worth the sacrifice of time, convenience, and money, which it will require.

It is peculiarly important, that those who navigate our public ships should be *native Americans*. Our seamen are believed to be—at least for our own purposes—better than those of any other nation; economical, vigorous, hardy, skilful; taught in the best schools; bred in the best nurseries; not ignorant of their rights; but governed with ease, when governed with justice. It is desirable not to mingle other and worse materials with such men; to injure their habits—create a spirit leading to insubordination and crime; and when the hour of action

comes, to have among them those who must contend, not for, but perhaps against their native flag. In peace, we can do better without foreign seamen; in war, slight temptations of avarice, and other causes, will lead them from us; and their presence will give us less confidence in battle. Every sailor, in our ships, should have, *located here*, all those attachments which bind man to his country. Long and steady service under his native flag, will increase fidelity to it, give a more generous courage in its defence, and ensure that devotion which shields the home and the fireside from invasion.

In attaining this condition, so far as the navy is concerned, it is a favorable circumstance, that habit induces the sailor to prefer our ships of war to the merchant or any other service; that although the discipline is more rigorous, his comforts are greater, his employments and vicissitudes less changing; he will therefore continue in them, even at less wages. If we can procure for and place in our navy, as many native American seamen as are required, we shall probably be able to retain them, and thus be prepared for every event which peace or war may produce. The numbers necessary for our merchant vessels and ships of war, may be readily estimated. Our tonnage, in 1826, amounted to 1,534,191; in 1827, probably to about 1,600,000; which, at the average before-mentioned, would require about 85,000 seamen. Our ships of war now in commission demand about 4,800 seamen, ordinary seamen, landsmen and boys. To man, in time of war, all the vessels which are authorized to be built, more than 20,000, including petty officers and excluding marines, would be necessary. The average annual increase has been before stated at about 5000. What is the precise number of our own citizens, whose sole employment is upon the water, and what the number of naturalized foreigners, cannot be precisely stated. There is great defect in the register of our seamen; a defect which ought to be remedied by legislative enactment.

It is respectfully suggested as proper,

1. That foreign seamen, although naturalized, be as rapidly excluded from our navy as possible. In conformity with this suggestion, an order has been issued to the officers engaged in recruiting, directing them to seek, first, native Americans, and to enlist none others except as matter of necessity. It is believed that this order will accomplish the design to a considerable extent.

2. That a larger proportion of landsmen than heretofore, should, while peace continues, be placed in our ships. An order to this effect has also been issued, and a direction given that none be enlisted under eighteen nor over twenty-five years. Good landsmen of the proper age, will, after one cruise of two or three years, become good ordinary seamen, and after a second cruise be good seamen, and continue permanently in the service.

3. That landsmen be enlisted in the interior. Such as are picked up in the cities, are generally dissipated men, advanced in years, with bad habits and enfeebled constitutions, who never can become useful in any capacity. On the contrary, young men may be enlisted in the country whose constitutions are vigorous, whose habits are good, and who will soon make efficient seamen. By this course also, a more

general feeling will be created in favor of the Navy—the right arm of the national defence.

A conviction of the importance of this measure, and a desire to test its practicability, induced the Department, a short time since, to establish a rendezvous in the neighbourhood of Carlisle and Harrisburg. Thus far it promises all that was hoped for from it, and should it continue to prosper, it will be used hereafter as necessity shall call for it, and the same plan will be adopted in other places.

4. That legislative provision be made to require merchant vessels, in proportion to their tonnage, to carry boys between the ages of 14 and 18; at least one for every hundred tons. In making this recommendation, it is not forgotten, that a slight effect will be produced upon the economy with which our navigation is conducted, nor that the subject has been heretofore presented to the consideration of the Senate, and the proposition resisted by an able report of the Committee of Commerce. But the recommendation is believed to be sustained by the successful practice of other nations; by the absolute necessity of providing a sufficient nursery, and constant supply for our rapidly increasing mercantile and military marine; by the smallness of the burden which the provision would impose upon our navigation, and by the high importance of being supported in our commercial career, by our own native citizens. The regulations for this subject do not properly find a place in this report.

But 5th. The most important measure connected with this subject is, legal authority to enlist with the written consent of their parents, boys over 13 and under 16 years, until they arrive at the age of 21; or which would, in many respects, be preferable, authority to take apprentices of the ages and for the period mentioned. There should be from 15 to 30 in every navy yard, and two for every gun, to our vessels in commission; making, in all, in the first instance, about 1200. Those in the navy yards should be assigned to the various duties performed there, and instructed in them, so as to furnish in a few years most competent workmen in every branch, who, being habituated to their employments, would be a steady and unfailing supply for the public wants in that Department. Those in our ships should, according to their capacities, be assigned to the labors of the common sailor, and as assistants to the petty officers, and would, before the expiration of their enlistment or indenture, be perfected in their respective duties. As their terms ended, their places should be constantly supplied, so as to keep, at every moment, the full number of boys in the service. Two years would be sufficient to prepare them to act as ordinary seamen, and three more as seamen. This plan, united to that of enlisting young landsmen, would give us an annual increase of from 3 to 500 good seamen, permanently united to the service, and ultimately secure all that our interest, on this point, can require. These apprentices should be clothed in our own manufactures—denied spirits in their rations, until they become men—educated by proper teachers in reading, writing, arithmetic, and navigation—be entitled to hospital pension and prize privileges—have a small amount of money reserved for them, and paid when their time expires, if their conduct has been

good, and a premium on re-entering. They would furnish, within 8 or 10 years from the commencement of the system, all our petty officers of every description, and the best rewards of virtuous effort, should be presented to them in promotions to the rank of warrant officers, and if their merits justified, eventually to the highest honors of the profession.

To those who may not have carefully made the calculations, the results of such a system would appear extravagant. When compared with our present plan, it would create a saving of not less than an hundred and fifty thousand dollars annually—would give us, in every department, the greatest efficiency and skill, and above all, would make the Navy what it ought to be, in every thing—American.

Respectfully submitted.

SAMUEL L. SOUTHARD.

Hon. SAMUEL SMITH,

President of the Senate of the United States.

CIRCULAR.

NAVY DEPARTMENT.

SIR: Justice to our seamen, as well as the interests of the service, requires, that efforts should be made to remedy the inconveniences which have resulted from the time of enlistment expiring, while the men are abroad, and no adequate means afforded for their return home. It will be the object of the Department, hereafter, as far as circumstances will permit, so to regulate the manning of our vessels, that the time of a majority of the crews shall expire about the same period, and to recall the vessels before that period arrives, so that the men may be in the United States when their contract with the government ends.

It will be obviously impossible, that this should be effected in every individual instance. You will therefore consider it your duty, and it is hereby enjoined upon you, when the time of service of seamen, ordinary seamen, &c., expires during your cruise, to induce them, by all proper considerations, to re-enter for the remainder of the cruise, informing them, as nearly as you can, what will be its duration. If they refuse to re-enter, and require their discharge, let it be promptly given to them, unless urgent necessity exists for their services; and you will procure for them, if possible, a passage in some vessel to the United States, on the lowest and best conditions, giving orders on the Department for the passage money. If they refuse to take the passage, and to return home, you will apprise the Department of it, and of what you have done on the subject; and give the like information to the Consul of the port nearest which you are, that he may regulate his conduct towards them with a full knowledge of the facts.

In every instance in which any person is discharged abroad, and his passage paid, or he declines accepting the passage, you will state the facts in his discharge.

I am, very respectfully, &c.

